

## **Skelsmergh and and Scalthwaiterigg Parish Council**

### **Chairman's Annual report 2018/19**

This year's business was very much occupied by the subject of communication. Poor mobile and Broadband service had been highlighted in the 2015 Community Plan but no-one could have predicted the dramatic and opportune announcement of the B4MS project to make available high-speed Broadband to every household in the Parish and adjoining parishes. We are greatly indebted to Dan Robinson and his team of volunteers for the time and commitment which they have brought to the project. Following a presentation at the social event held jointly with the Community Hall Committee it was unanimously agreed that a grant of £1000 should be made towards the running costs of the scheme. Parishioners who have already 'gone live' report very favourably on the level of connectivity being achieved from this remarkable community effort. Dan gave an update at the Meet and Mingle event in March. If all goes well complete coverage will have been achieved by the end of 2019.

That is not the only community activity which has been stimulated by our power to make grants. The twice-yearly litter-picks were well supported and do a great job in suppressing unsightly litter,( if not the perpetrators who make the job necessary.) Hot drinks and bacon butties round –off the morning's work in a welcome fashion.

A grant was made to the 1918 Centenary exhibition which like its predecessor in 2014 drew large attendance and earned massive praise for Tony Cousins and his family who put on such a well- researched and moving evocation of the lives of the local men caught in the conflict and of the sacrifice of those who did not return.

A grant was also made to the Bowling Club to assist with their purchase of new mats. In total we spent £1966.92 on grants.

Due to the onset of ash die-back in the Woodland it was agreed to employ a chain-saw operator to begin a programme of felling. Receipts from the sale of firewood and other woodland products meant that a net income of £204 came in from this source. The voluntary working days in November and December were not only worthwhile socially and physically but also contributed useful produce for sale.

Following the 2018 District Council elections we welcomed to our meetings our three councillors, Pat Bell, Anne Hutton and Hazel Hodgson, whose support for an SLDC grant to B4MS was much appreciated by us and our adjacent parishes. Their input to our meetings, together with that of Stan Collins, representing Cumbria County Council is ever welcome. Stan's involvement with the plans to replace the destroyed highway at Gurnal Bridge led to a site visit with the engineers who undertook to take account of our local concerns in progressing the planning application. Hopefully, this will result in the creation of a lane which blends with its surroundings and the preservation of pedestrian access to the river bank.

Other highway matters discussed and referred to County Highways included the ongoing issue of HGV signing to deter use of the approaches to Laverock Bridge. In general the signage has been successful though occasionally some vehicles have got through and caused problems. Only changes to SatNav will produce a foolproof solution, it seems. Complaints about drain clearance, potholes and ragwort were duly passed on but with variable responses and not always satisfactory results. However, an issue regarding light pollution and danger to highway users from the rugby club's overhead columns was resolved – but only via a series of informal approaches.

Even lowly parish councils must bow to regulations: this year we had to register for Data Protection, thus adding to the considerable responsibilities of our Clerk, Karen Little, who also has to submit our accounts for both internal and external audit. We are fortunate that she continues to monitor our activities and 'keep our house in order'.

The Environment Group, which helps guide us on local concerns, has been active in monitoring local hedgerows in connection with verge and hedge cutting and the use of herbicides. There has been correspondence with both Cumbria Highways and a landowner. Footpath monitoring and reporting resulted in new signage and stile repairs. Volunteers turned out to continue the campaign to eliminate Himalayan Balsam within the parish and elsewhere where seeding has affected our river systems. Constant vigilance has to be maintained. The Group also facilitated a walk along the Sprint. In September, Jayne Wilkinson from South Cumbria Rivers Trust, came to talk to us about the initiatives being promoted to conserve the local river catchments which provided an opportunity to emphasise the importance of local consultation prior to works taking place.

Through attendance at the District Association's meetings we maintained links with parish councils from across South Lakeland but the work of the Upper Kent Local Area Partnership has been in abeyance.

We were consulted on and responded to 22 planning applications during the year. Although the clerk is delegated the task of responding within the allocated timescale every effort is made to ensure that local views inform the response.

It will be evident from the above that councillors have to give both their time and their minds to a wide range of local issues and I should like to thank my colleagues for their continuing support and their decision (with one exception) to put forward their names for the next four-year term of office.

Mary Chapman has, however, decided to stand down after serving for the duration of three councils. During that time she has served with distinction, leading the consultation on and adoption of two Community Plans and being instrumental in the implementation of popular initiatives such as the litter picks and the defibrillator. We

shall miss her contribution at meetings but hope that she will continue to participate in other ways.